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Traversing Theory and Transgressing Academic Discourses: Arts-based Research in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Pre-service teacher education is marked by linear and sequential programming which offers a plethora of strategies and methods (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Grant & Zeichner, 1997). This paper emerges from a three year study within a core education subject in pre-service teacher education in Australia. This ‘practitioner’ research (Zeichner, 1999) engaged the problematics of authentic and meaningful learner-centred teaching and learning through an arts-based curriculum. Over the period of the study, two hundred and eighty pre-service teachers participated in a ‘dialogical performance’ (Conquergood, 2003) of pedagogy about curriculum and assessment through the construction of art about curriculum and assessment. The possibilities of an arts-based pedagogy in pre-service education were

affirmed by the research. An enacted epistemological move by the teacher-educators led to similar shifts by the students. This opened a space for the reappearance of learner through engagements with identities, positionings and agency. This was an act of ‘putting theory to work’ (Lather, 2006, 2007) and invoked transgressive practices of academic discourses.

Introduction

This arts-based study makes a contribution to the relatively new field of teacher education research. It is positioned within the arts-based educational research (ABER) tradition of Barone (2000, 2001), Eisner (1985, 1991, 1995), and Barone and Eisner (2006). The purposes are to enhance perspectives of teacher education pedagogy through an arts-based educational research project. It is nearly two decades since Eisner (1991) proposed a graduate school curriculum which addresses the crisis of representation through the arts. This practitioner research highlights the limited take up of arts-based teaching and arts-based research in teacher education. We align ourselves with Finley (2005) who suggests:

In arts-based research, paradigms for making meaning in the contextual realms of art and social science collide, coalesce, and restructure to become something that is not strictly identifiable as either art or science (p.684).

This research, embedded in the intuitive, contextualised and contingent understandings of ‘practitioner’ is where our research project takes a space in the literature. The authors are both teachers and researchers and this research is about our own practice as teacher educators (Zeichner, 1999). It features ‘intentionality’ and ‘systematicity’ (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006) as the research study was planned from the initial stages of the curriculum development of the course. We established research questions and involved the students as research participants from the beginning of each semester in each of the three years. The data collection was also determined from the outset and was written into the plans of the course workshops.

In this paper we address the following research questions: What is the nature and quality of the learning experience in an arts-based approach? What is made available through an arts-based approach to teaching in teacher education? In what way is arts-based research generative for this work?

The analysis of our research data distinguished the ways this arts based pedagogy supported student construction of understandings of pedagogy, of recognition of the place of identity in teaching, and of appreciation for differentiated learning. Further, it provided visual record of

the intricacy of the social world of the classroom. As teachers of these students/research participants we tracked the development of each student's understandings over the period of each semester. We have not used this as data here as in this paper we are concerned with the nature of that learning experience. To this end as teacher educators we engaged a 'connoisseur's' appreciation and critique (Eisner, 1991, 1998). In accord with many educators we are aware of the value of hands on, discovery, and authentic learning in school classrooms. Indeed, like many teacher educators, we advocate these to our pre-service teachers. However, what happens when pre-service teachers experience these approaches themselves through art in a graduate school curriculum? We take up this issue in greater depth in the section 'Arts-based teaching in teacher education' later in this paper

There are layers of complexity in this research project. At the centre is an arts-based teaching approach in teacher education. Around this is an arts-based education research project emphasizing visual methodologies. There are multiple sources of data including images, artefacts, and participant field notes. In analyzing data, word was not privileged over image or artefact. Honouring this approach and interweaving the analysis from multiple sources has been challenging and there are instances of tension which have not been fully resolved. Representation is a final complication. As this is arts-based research we have taken the opportunity provided by this journal to attempt what we consider to be an aesthetic representation through assembling and working selected data.

Teacher Education: A New Field of Inquiry

In 2005, the American Education Research Association (AERA) published their comprehensive report on teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). A critical analysis of research into pre-service teacher education in the United States, it made recommendations for a future research agenda. In summarizing the findings for each of the nine topics covered by the report, the panel repeatedly identified a need for qualitative research that: 'probes relationships' of teacher knowledge, attitudes and practice' (p.11); 'examines interactions' between teaching techniques and teachers' thinking (p.16); and investigates 'interactions between ... pedagogical approaches and programmatic contexts' (p.20). Such calls are consistent with Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon's (1998) critical review of teacher education. These authors expressed concern for the 'isolated nature of research programs' in teacher education. They suggest educational researchers need to refocus attention on the interconnected nature of being – an ecological approach within which 'we become aware of different levels of complexity, new proprieties and insights emerge', (Wideen et al 1998, p.168). In Australia, a national inquiry into teacher education (House of Representatives, 2007) found that 'there is simply not a sufficiently rich body of research evidence to enable it to come to any firm conclusions about the overall quality of teacher

education in Australia' (p. 5). The Australian inquiry spanned two years and received 195 submissions from 170 individuals and organizations.

This issue of 'quality' is not confined to the Australian context. Consistency and clarity of definitions in teacher education research have been highlighted as a concern internationally (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Noffke & Zeichner 2006). Little wonder teacher education is a relatively new field of inquiry (Noffke & Zeichner 2006; Borko, Liston, & Whitcom 2007) and the nature of research that has been conducted in the field. Broeckmans (2003) points out that most research in the field is behaviorist in nature, concentrating on overt behaviors that can be measured and do not look into the process over extended periods. Kincheloe (2003) so clearly reminds us 'rarely do the most significant questions of human affairs lend themselves to quantification and the pseudo-certainty which accompanies them'. There is a need for in-depth, descriptive and situated research that calls for researchers 'to get their hands dirty' (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2006, p. 111).

Noffke and Zeichner (2006) acknowledge that radical research frameworks such as critical and feminist theory have made important methodological contributions in teacher education, but research is often conducted by researchers in 'social foundations areas' and not 'in the teacher preparation programs deeply connected to practical work in schools' (p. 830). As Zeichner (2006) notes, teacher education is largely seen as a 'cash cow' that feeds the more prestigious research agenda of the faculty (p.335). Practitioner research (Borko, Liston, & Whitcom, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006) on the other hand, has for decades faced criticism by those within the academy that research by teachers into their practice lacks legitimacy or creditability (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). In some ways research in teacher education finds itself in a catch-22 situation. Practitioners, to varying degrees, accept that 'the relations of knowledge and practice are complex and distinctly nonlinear' (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006, p. 508) and therefore may produce 'risky' research. Rhedding-Jones (2003) suggests that when practitioners as researchers '... look at their own or other people's crises as pedagogues, their disorientations, and their incompetence may also produce research where what is pointed to is silence rather than words, and stillness rather than action' (p. 11). Such tense silences are present in the images, artefacts and participants' words in this project that are shared later in the paper.

ABER in Teacher Education

Representation generates considerable debate in qualitative research, particularly data and data-ing that resist completeness and rejoice the complex (Alvesson, 2002; Stronach & MacLure, 1997). While there is begrudging admission that both qualitative and quantitative data are neither 'transparent nor value-neutral' (Eisenhart, 2006, p. 567), there continues to be considerable divergent opinion about the legitimacy of certain ways of telling the research

story. There is a persistent belief that the lack of objectivity associated with ‘creative’ representations can be overcome with conventional devices of research – such as tables, charts and diagrams. In a sense, tables and charts may be just as much a mask and every bit as much an element of discourse as any sophisticated or creative piece of writing, image or any other media. The question at the heart of the representation debate is how can social worlds be brought before, or opened up to, those who wish to understand or engage with those worlds in a manner that is faithful to the complexities of realities?

In 1934 Dewey first published *Art as Experience* in which he distinguished a narrowly defined assessment-based education and an experiential open-ended education exemplified by the arts. Elliot Eisner (1997) has also long reminded us that ‘research [does] not belong to science alone’ (p.5) and in *The Enlightened Eye* (Eisner 1991) argues comprehensively that there are many ways in which our world can and should be known. He is convinced that educational research will be enhanced by expanding the ways in which the social world of education is described and interpreted. Indeed, teaching/learning-*poesis* will not be evidenced by instruments and tools, questionnaires and standard deviations (Senior, 2008).

Our data arises out of and from student writings and images from the arts-based workshops and exhibition. We do not privilege word over image, writings from ‘teacher’ over writings from ‘students’, nor do we use image as photo elicitation. The generative possibilities of image in educational research are significant even if we suspend our imaginative awareness by recognizing that: ‘every image is manipulated’; the content of images is based upon the producer’s intent; and that the response of the reader ‘will be based on content, perception of intent and context’ (Goldstein, 2007, p. 79). Mirzoeff (2006) states that visuality is not bounded but a space in which time is experienced as ‘*time as lived*, not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicities and simultaneities, its presences and absences (original emphasis, Mbembe in Mirzoeff, 2006, p.76). He describes visuality as a network: a ‘series of connected and dispersed lines, crossing time and space’ (p.76). Mitchell (2005) does suggest that there is another way in which we can critique, interrogate and know images; a sensitive approach that sounds the ‘images with just enough force to make them resonate’ (p.9). Rather than getting caught up with what they *mean*, he suggests we ask what images *want*. This artistic research activity opens up the social worlds inside our data as the reverberation of these images ‘fill with life’ (Minkowski in Bachelard, 1969, p.xvi) within the margins of this journal article.

Making art is a passionate visceral activity that creates opportunities for communion among participants, researchers, and the various audiences who encounter the research text. Arts-based research crosses the boundaries of art and research as defined by conventions formed in historically, culturally bounded

contexts of the international art market and in the knowledge market dominated by higher education. (Finley, 2005, p. 685)

We are aware that practitioner arts-based research is relegated to the margins of educational research (Bullough, 2006) as it challenges the traditional positioning of academic discourse and what counts as research. In this new terrain, where theory is put to work (Lather, 2007) we position our research against the criteria for ABER:

Does the work enhance meanings and deepen the conversation?

Does it have an illuminating effect; does it give the reader the opportunity to notice?

Is it referentially adequate; do we notice what is claimed to be there?

Is it generative; does it promote new questions?

Is it incisive; does it focus tightly on educational issues?

Is it generalizable; does it make new connections? (Barone and Eisner, 2006)

This project does not, and can not, provide explicit findings and direct causal links. Rather, the data ‘probes relationships’ of teacher knowledge, attitudes and practice’ (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, p.11) and ‘examines interactions’ between teaching techniques and teachers’ thinking (p.16). Nuanced readings of the data require the trained eye of the ‘connoisseur’ skilled to ‘make fine grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities’ (Eisner, 1998, p.63). In this case, the ‘connoisseur’ is the teacher educator who draws upon their professional knowledge and experience of pedagogy.

Arts-Based Teaching in Teacher Education

Universities, schools and professional bodies are constrained and underpinned by understandings of content driven knowledges that are linked to competencies evident in action. Thus pre-service teacher education is marked by linear and sequential programming: entering the course as ‘student’ teachers, overcoming hurdles of ever increasing demand, and graduating. Upon securing employment the process continues from provisional to accredited ‘teacher’. Teacher educators find ourselves working within a contemporary socio-political discourse increasingly restrained by literalism (Doll, 2000). Alongside this university context, in the area of international and national education policy, political language and concerns focus on those things that are tangible, measurable and ‘scientific’. Inherently political arenas such as teacher education become essentially economic ones. Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2005) refers to ‘the outcomes trap’ in teacher education. She describes a future Orwellian nightmare of databases that track and rank teachers and teacher education courses, where preparing students for benchmarking tests will subsume all else, and where ‘the public interest is understood to be the sum of each individual’s private interest’ (p.13).

Brady and Kanpol (2000) criticize modernist paradigms in teacher education as ‘hegemonizing its agents and its vision of the present and the future’ (p. 40). Both authors resonated earlier arguments by Greene (1995) and Ellsworth (1992) by consigning concepts such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘effective teaching’ as merely talk ‘because many of these concepts are devoid of the social, political and philosophical pursuits within them’ (Brady & Kanpol, 2000, p. 40). Their article lamented that many teacher educators fell into reproducing the content and skills methodology of preparing teachers and concluded:

In as much as critical teacher educators provide readings and teach theories of critical multiculturalism, or feminist approaches to teaching, a fundamental understanding of these inequities needs to be explored through the concrete specificity within teacher educators’, pre-service teachers’, and student teachers’ daily lives. The connection between theory and practice needs to be taken even further, bringing it into the realm of a ‘theory of lived practice.’ (p.47)

We worked within the tension and spaces between revised curriculum content and innovative approaches to learning and the pressure of providing for large numbers of students. We did this in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne as part of a subject team of twelve staff working with eight hundred students in a one year pre-service graduate program. To teach and to research in this politically charged context confronts pedagogical and methodological positions. In a context of mass education we offered teaching and research which crossed borders, which “move[d] from interpretation and emotional evocation to praxis, empowerment and social change’ (Denzin, 2003, p.133). As Denzin argues we are in a critical performative pedagogical moment; we, as practitioner researchers, are positioned to, and responsible for, elaborating this moment – ‘to put theory to work’ (Lather, 2007).

We were dissatisfied with teaching about social constructivism and authenticity in learning through the normal academic discourse which reproduced dichotomized teacher/student identities and hegemonic relationships. Ultimately, it silently reproduced a teacher-centred transmission model. Maxine Greene (1995) asserts that ‘mere talk’ obscures rather than illuminates and trivializes larger issues of authenticity, reality and existentialism:

How can meaning be restored? How can the extinguished light be lit again so that teachers and learners can appear before one another and show, in speech and action, who they are and what they can do? (p. 44)

A vision for students, or a vision for improving the quality of teacher education, ‘must relate both to existing conditions and to something we are trying to bring into being, something that goes beyond a present situation’ (Greene, 1995, p.51). Dewey’s (1938; 1997) position that

meaning is derived from ‘conflict and entanglement’ between teachers and learners and not diminished by it, would suggest that a situation that problematises the very identities of teacher/learner/researcher is precisely the site of meaningful inquiry. We determined to design and implement a curriculum based on authentic learning about curriculum based on the premise of social constructivism. We chose the creation of an art exhibition as an appropriate site for this curriculum as recognition of both the artistry of teaching and the ways that art making gives access to meaning

The voices of Dewey (1938), Barone and Eisner (1997) are heard in our arts-based approach to teaching. It was understood, constructed and represented by a plethora of art pieces - sand mandalas, digital images, old school desks reinvented, and curriculum garments largely beyond the margins of these pages. As teachers we engaged the arts as a vehicle for ‘the dance of ebb and flow of participation’ (Abbs, 2003, p.61) in our sense making and that of our students. Learning in an arts-based curriculum allows the possibility of a performance, which, like rehearsal, is ‘twice behaved’ (Schechner, 1988). The artist teacher is involved in the learning work of performance twice over – in the rehearsal or design and construction stage and also in the performance stage. In this way the performance is constructive as well as representative and communicative of understanding. ‘Rehearsals are not only a preparation for the opening [night], they are for the actor a terrain of discoveries, about him [her] self, his [her] possibilities, his [her] chances to transcend his [her] limits’ (Grotowski in Richards 1995, p.118). The performance of arts-based teaching is intentional – it aims to be transformative or effective (Beeman, 1986).

The semester subject (approximately 9 weeks in duration) required our students to attend the programmed weekly one-hour lecture and a weekly three-hour workshop. The students used the entire workshops to create an art piece about curriculum for a public exhibition on campus. This entailed extensive negotiation as students jostled for materials, space and ideas. It also entailed extensive negotiation with our subject coordinator, administrative staff, university hierarchy and our teacher educator colleagues. Our curriculum design was epistemologically contrary to the enacted curriculum of many of our colleagues. What may have been accepted practice in the Fine Arts faculty was dismissed by some in the Education faculty as non-academic, frivolous, and likely to produce little; evidenced by comments such as “*Year 9 poster work*” from one professor (Field note 249) and “*unsophisticated and immature drawings*” from another (Field note 414). These particular criticisms were directed towards the products of the arts-based classroom. However, we were concerned with the process not the products. The art pieces were not part of the assessment, but constituted the public performance. The students were cognizant of this distinction: “The process of creating was far more important than the end product...” (Hannah, student writings, 2005). However, the comments by colleagues did carry some weight with us.

Firstly, they reflected our own concerns and ongoing critical reflection that this was risky practice as there was no platform for arts-based pedagogy in teacher education from which to work. Secondly, we were concerned by the ‘transgressive’ nature of our pedagogy. The public performances of the curriculum and assessment art exhibitions were provocative particularly in the pedagogically conservative institutional climate of the academy. Our concerns, sometimes triggered by such comments similar to those above, focused on the appropriateness of the decision to teach in this way. Sometimes we were uncertain of the ‘silences’ and the ‘stillness’. The demanding and unfamiliar nature of this work was confronting and uncomfortable, and a honeymoon period marked by intense curiosity and positive anticipation was short lived for some students. While the students had the option to move out of the workshops at any stage, all remained despite the uncertainty. This work may have been confronting, but for most participants the experience appeared to be powerful - sometimes in unexpected ways. One such student was Sarah who chose to spend all of the workshop time deliberating and discussing the veracity of the arts-based project itself while making it clear to everyone that she would simply “slap something together” (Field note 78) the night before the exhibition. Indeed, this is exactly what she did. The paint still wet on the light bulb of her piece, she gingerly placed it amongst the other exhibits. Sarah admitted later in reflective notes that it was at that moment, as she placed her “glib” work amongst the others, that perhaps she had “missed the point of the whole exercise” (Sarah, student writing, 2005).

In the following pages we offer an aesthetic representation of the data analysis. Within the confines of this paper we present a partial rendering of the nature and quality of the learning experience in an arts-based approach. This selection makes argument for linking arts-based pedagogy and research. Sequentially the following representation evidences:

- Enactments and student responses to arts-based pedagogy in the classroom;
- Student construction of understandings of pedagogy;
- Student recognition of the place of identity in teaching;
- Student appreciation for multiple ways of learning; and
- Finally, the complexity of social world of the classroom.

What the Data “Wanted”



Image 1. As we begin - staying safe

*Mary, Mary quite conversational where do your tables go?
Well structured classroom?
Teacher and the class -assume normal positions?
The discomfort of finding a starting place, where do I begin? Will this work?
(Anonymous – co-authored writing, 2005)*

During the initial workshops, we invited students to begin the learning of curriculum theory by constructing art *about* curriculum theory. We walked amongst students listening, talking, and bringing out materials and theorists. In the beginning, we were not greatly dislocated (Laclau, 1990); the students came to the classes knowing that they were to ‘do’ this subject through art and that at the end of the semester they were to have a public exhibition of their work. Participation in this arts-based workshop was voluntary. Each year students could choose from twenty-seven other workshops which were run along a traditional didactic approach.



Image 2. Discomfort

The most significant moment in my study of curriculum and assessment was the day when Mary and Kim came into the classroom and with hardly a word, proceeded to work on drawings and whatnot without giving the class any directions...

Significantly, this work attracted a majority of students that had undergraduate degrees from a broad range of disciplines such as science, engineering and mathematics. The average student age was thirty years and many came with successful academic (PhD, honors and master degrees) and business backgrounds.



Some students looked lost; some seemed agitated whilst other others waited very patiently for the lecturers to say something. This incident summed it all up for me. You do your own learning! True learning comes from within yourself and not what other people tell you. (Max, student writing, 2005)

Image 3. Waiting, watching-almost



Image 4. Giving up the seats

In the second three-hour workshop we entered the room to begin our own artwork in the large open space in the middle of the room. We gave no instructions. We gave no warning. We continued our work for an hour. The students were often silent, disconcerted, and they waited...

Following the enactment of our epistemological shift from lectern to floor, from overheads to paint and pastels, the students tentatively gave up their seats.



Image 5. Leaning in to the curriculum

I am sitting outside following our art installation class determined to begin a written dialogue. I have conducted an internal dialogue almost from the time it was suggested in class....the art class has challenged many of my ideas regarding how to create a productive classroom environment. While I was beginning to understand the limitations of a traditional classroom structure, it has only been through seeing a real alternative that I have begun to really challenge some of my basic beliefs about both teaching and learning... (Jen, student writing, 2006)

Throughout the workshops there were many groupings and a few participants working alone. The only constraint on the participants was that there was to be a public art exhibition at the end of the semester. Participation in the creation of art was always at the discretion of the individual. No one was asked to work in a particular way or with particular groupings. Having sat and listened, literally, through most of their schooling, students form ingrained opinions of what it is to teach from their position as not-the-teacher. The problem of at least twelve years 'observational apprenticeship' (Lortie, 1975, p.61) that many student teachers bring to their education study is one of the 'perennial challenges in learning to teach' (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p.305).

The process of creating was far more important than the end product. The almost hypnotic state we entered when focused on such a meaningful task is exactly what we desire for our students...These beautiful delicate designs that I was shown were part of a journey for this artist. She had her own meanings behind those she had created. I decided to create my own, my own mandala, my own journey out of myself. It would be representational of my journey of discovery through this class and how my views of can grow within that. (Hannah, student writing, 2004)



Image 6. Curriculum worlds through sand mandala



Image 7. Curriculum performance during exhibition



Image 8. Mandala ceremony - curriculum changes

Our artwork took many hours of careful work to create and only a matter of minutes to sweep away. There was a sense of disappointment at this time, a longing to hold onto what we had invested our energy and time inThis gave us insight into the thoughts of curriculum designers and those who control the curriculum, but it was a powerful reminder that we can not hold onto that which is destined to change. In order for curriculum ideas to grow and improve, it is imperative that we not hold onto our current notions too tightly. (Laura, student writing, 2005)

Heidegger's (1968) call for teachers to reconsider their understanding of teaching in light of an identity as a learner, posed challenges to us as well. In our role as a teacher educator and practitioner researcher, positioned as the one to be listened to, how do we maintain a capacity 'of being more teachable' (p.8). As experienced teacher educators we had been accustomed to the safety of the academic discourse of tertiary classrooms. In those comfortable settings we engaged students in discussions about pedagogy and curriculum; we directed conversations which challenged students. However, in the riskier arts-based spaces amongst the improvised, the trickles of awkward laughter and sighs of frustration, we noticed our own and the students' struggle over identities and positionings. We also noted the ways students approached us; the ways they moved in and out of their work. Students produced written reflections and in these we were privy to the internal positionings and repositioning around responsibility for learning:

I am almost ashamed to admit my shortcomings in writing due to my belief that everyone else out there, all the other student-teachers, have their theories sorted out and ready to use, and I am the only vague and confused individual with limited wisdom to offer... I have become incessantly jittery on the inside. My initial

nervousness and unease about our class structure took some effort to dismantle before I could truly let myself go during our classes and during the exhibition which was the grand accomplishment to culminate this. Some reminders of my earlier sensations of unrest came back to the surface on that memorable day of the Exhibition when some observers commented:

“Shouldn’t you be studying?”

“What are you achieving by just being here?”

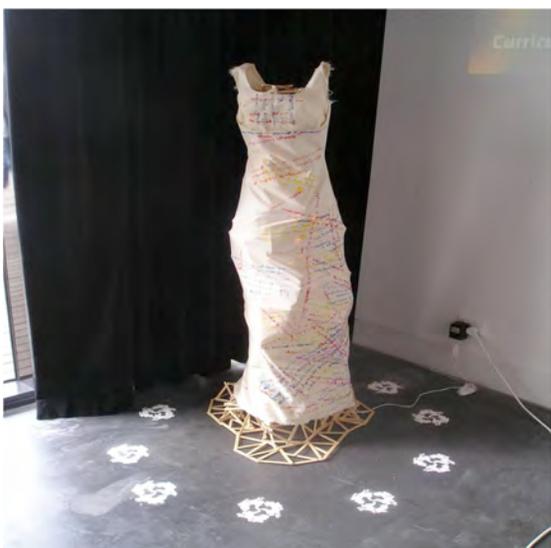
“Take out a pen and write something, you’re not learning.”

(Isabel, student writing, 2006)

In these reflections students recorded the way they noticed others learning in the arts-based workshop:

What this activity has taught me is to be aware of different ways of determining understanding; it has released me from the well-known teaching fact that students have only learned something when they can recite it parrot fashion onto an exam booklet! (Sara, student writing 2006)

I saw a beautiful euphuism for the learning process in the art exhibition, one of the groups spent hours producing the most incredibly detail sand sculpture and then once finished just swept it away, with nothing left to show for their hours of hard work and dedication. Well, not nothing - they had what they had learnt; they had the process in their minds... (Ben, student writing, 2004)



Since the class is set up with a broad amount of “space” for the student to move around in, I have been able to work at my own pace on my petticoat installation, while contributing and exchanging ideas with another group. I feel that much of my learning is achieved through these ongoing discussions which have traversed a wide range of subjects... (Pram, student writing, 2005)

Image 9. Student in conversation with curriculum

To teach and to research in this pedagogically charged context, we were enacting teaching and research which crossed borders, which “move[d] from interpretation and emotional evocation to praxis, empowerment and social change’ (Denzin 2003, p.133). Denzin argues we are in a critical performative pedagogical moment. The students had written about the ways that others were learning in this chaotic space, but we were beginning to realize that there may be something beyond word, beyond each individual student in the images.



I often wondered that to an onlooker, our class must have looked like a mess (this is where the fugue thing came in – before I learned the art of music analysis, fugues were awful, messy pieces of music that were always hard to learn). And I pondered (out loud), that our class was in fact extremely organized. Eavesdropping on some of the other groups, it may have seemed excessively organised... We (the students) were the complexity in the chaos. (Rebecca, student writing 2004)

Image 10. Complex relationships

In the very first class I heard the work ‘mandala’. I overheard it being discussed in groups....yet I didn’t know what a mandala was... (Hannah, student writing, 2005)

In this uneasy space we sought to recognize the complexity and fullness of the social world of these workshops. As part of our analysis we took all the images from across the three years of data collection and laid them alongside each other. We sought out patterns, reverberations and lines.

What the Research “Wants”

The methods we have played with in this research are not tools of data collection and analysis but ‘contrivances’ (at the one time inventive and deceitful) for data collection and analysis. They are generative of multiple understandings and interpretations, brushing lightly,

glimpsing, noticing engagements of agency and identity which are being negotiated and renegotiated in teacher education. This transgressive work troubles the treacherous business of privileging word and image. Multiple and conflicting realities of the social world of students and teacher educators are constructed and represented in the pedagogic assemblages. We have sought a research contour that responds to the shapes of the students and the contextual constraints. We have sought out the nuances of movement and speech, of paint and sand. We have glimpsed all of this, the reconfiguring of space, position and understanding, from our 'angle of repose' (Richardson, 2000) as practitioner researchers.

In the arts-based pre-service classroom this research put theory to work. We transgressed the academic discourse and opened up a space in which teacher educator and students may reappear before each other 'and show, in speech and action, who they are and what they can do' (Greene, 1995, p.44). In this 'de/re-territorialized' (Trinh, 1991, p.24) epistemological space both teacher educator and students were constantly called to account. This space permitted the valuing 'of treating students as individuals, of looking beyond impoverished conceptions of meaning in education to make their [our] lives and the lives of their [our] students more complex, complicated, and connected' (Hostetler, Macintyre Latta, & Sarroub, 2007, p. 237).

Revisiting the layers of this project, arts-based teaching engaged the problematics of teaching and learning. Meaningfulness was provoked for many in the workshops through the contiguity of:

- The authentic nature of the process of making art for a public exhibition;
- The agency exercised by students in the level of participation or otherwise;
- curriculum and assessment as the content for their work which deeply implicated issues of teacher/learner identity; and
- Knowledge construction as intersubjective and 'developed through social relations and negotiations' (Grumet, 1988, p.9). (On occasion we were challenged to stand firm and refuse to take up a transmission position in our relationships with students - "*For goodness sake, Kim! You're the teacher here: just tell us how to teach!*" Fieldnote, 302).

The arts-based research, the second layer of the project, gives us access to this nuanced reading of the teacher education classroom. Re-envisioning generative 'conceptions of meaning' (Hostetler, Macintyre Latta, & Sarroub, 2007, p. 242) in teacher education has been a transgressive performance. For as Trinh (1991) asserts 'reality is more fabulous, more maddening, more strangely manipulative than fiction' (p. 39).

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